

Digital Storytelling in the Classroom

What is Digital Storytelling?

Digital Storytelling brings the ancient art of telling stories to life using technology. While the art of storytelling has been around for thousands of years, the advent of personal computers and approachable communication technologies has allowed storytelling to become digital.

Our definition of digital storytelling arises out of the work of Dana Atchley and Joe Lambert at the Center for Digital Storytelling. In 1994, they crafted digital stories that were focused on first person narratives that use images, narration and music to frame our memories as powerful stories.

The ability to personalize stories with pictures and personal narration gives the story special meaning not only for the creator, but for the listeners. Digital Storytelling provides new ways to combine various technology mediums such as graphics, audio, video, animation and web site publishing to create powerful stories for all to see and hear.

Why Digital Storytelling is Important

Digital Storytelling can be very powerful for many students addressing various types of learning styles and modalities. Digital Storytelling provides meaning to learning through the use of their auditory, visual and kinesthetic skills. Students are also required to use higher order thinking skills in their creativity of their stories. However, much of the power of Digital Storytelling comes from the collaboration and teamwork process. In a collaborative environment, students are actively engaged in the exchange of ideas and are not only responsible for reaching their own academic goals, but the goals of others in the group. This provides opportunity for students to think critically, which promotes life long learning.

Digital storytelling is an effective way to engage students in their learning. First of all, it asks for their perspective and validates it as important. Secondly, they get to work in a medium that is relevant and meaningful to their lives (computers). The ability to tell their story in a variety of ways - through sounds, music, graphics, photographs, and original artwork allows them to express their creativity in ways other than just text. The skills used in creating digital stories requires them to build planning, organizational, and time management skills.

Why go to all the time and effort to prepare digital stories?

- Storytelling aids in the development of a student's ability to interpret events beyond his immediate experience.
- Introduce students to communicating ideas in a multimedia format. Students need wide experience with verbal, visual and textual communication, if they are to achieve success.
- Contribute to social and cognitive development through sharing experiences.
- Introduce classic tales which explain the shared background of a community.
- Help students appreciate their own cultural heritage as well as the heritage of others.
- Enrich various areas of the curriculum, such as language arts, history or science.
- Develop listening skills.
- Entertainment and motivation.
- Aid in vocabulary development.

Using Digital Storytelling In the Classroom

Digital storytelling can be used in the classroom in a myriad of ways. Telling personal stories helps students learn about voice in a narrative form, as well as first person perspective. Since modern communication involves "writing" with pictures and music, having students create digital stories helps them build these skills.

You can also use digital storytelling to address curriculum areas beyond language arts and media literacy. For example, students can retell an event from the life of a famous person they are studying to help us understand why this person acted the way they did. They can take the voice of a drop of water and show its progression through the water cycle or path through a watershed. Younger students can become an animal and discuss habitat, food, predation, and other life cycle issues. Public service announcements can be used as both a persuasive writing exercise and a way to address science content such as health or conservation.